DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 215 317 CS 006 613

AUTHOR Shannon, Patrick
TITLE On Mastery Learning: Some Unwarranted Managerial Constraints Placed on Teachers during Their Reading Instruction.
PUB DATE Apr 82
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (27th, Chicago, IL, April 26-30, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; Educational Theories; Elementary Secondary Education; *Mastery Learning; Negative Attitudes; *Reading Instruction; Reading Programs; *Teacher Role; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Theory Practice Relationship

ABSTRACT

Examining the translation of mastery learning theory into the practice of reading programs, this paper challenges the appropriateness of mastery learning for reading instruction. Noting that the use of the term "mastery" is arrogant, conservative, and dogmatic, the paper explores the ramifications of translating mastery learning theory into classroom practice. The paper shows that limited time for learning to read, mastery learning's assumption that all students should learn the same content, and the schools' need to regain public confidence have forced reading instruction to become a managerial rather than educational concern, thereby limiting teachers to the role of using prepackaged materials designed outside of their instructional context. This thesis is supported by brief descriptions of two exemplary mastery reading programs--one in Chicago and one that served as a model for Right to Read. (RL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED215317

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
X Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

On Mastery Learning: Some Unwarranted Managerial Constraints Placed On Teachers During Their Reading Instruction

Patrick Shannon
University of Houston

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Patrick Shannon
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS006613

On Mastery Learning: Some Unwarranted Managerial Constraints Placed On Teachers During Their Reading Instruction

Teachers, reading teachers, administrators, open your minds. We come not to praise mastery learning, but to bury it. That statement with apologies to Shakespeare, should warn you of the perspective on mastery learning to be presented this afternoon. Actually in terms of the title for this session, Mastery Learning: Panecea or Plague, I lie a little toward the center from plague. In my mind, plague conjures up visions of the Black Death of Europe. There, in 1347, Kipchak Khan Janibeg introduced the plague to Western Society by catapulting infested corpses over the walls of Kaffa in an attempt to take the beseiged city. That plague killed one third of the European population in three years. I find mastery learning tame by comparison. While I am quite convinced that mastery learning is not lethal, I have strong reservations concerning the appropriateness of its application to reading and to reading instruction.

First among those concerns is the concept "mastery." What arrogance the term connotes -- To be the master of reading. I. A. Richards addressed the shallowness of this notion in his book Practical Criticism. He identified and classified the errors adult readers made in comprehending poetry. According to Richards and anyone who reads his convincing arguments, even these mature readers are still in the process of mastering reading. I think it was Goethe who said "I learn to read again, each time I read a book." Perhaps, my position on the term, mastery, is best expressed by Thomas Huxley. "If a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, is there anyone who knows so much as to be out of danger?"

My second concern is that the concept of mastery is essentially a conservative concept. Proponents are convinced that all knowledge worth knowing resides with the designers of the curriculum. Mastery learning implies that knowledge is external and abstract to the learner; knowledge is to be acquired -- not constructed in a personal fashion by each individual. Accordingly, knowledge is defined as what is already known. This definition places enormous power in the hands of curriculum designers, and historically such power has been abused. For example, we are all familiar with the conservative influence the Catholic Church exerted on education during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Suffice it to say, few students during that time were asked to master Galileo's reorganization of the heavens. Thus, mastery learning requires that we have faith in the wisdom of the curriculum designers.

Moreover, mastery learning implies that knowledge is absolute. That is, there is one correct interpretation of phenonema. It suggests that until learners recognize that interpretation; they are simply learners, but after they recognize it, they become masters of that knowledge. I ask you, when did Picasso become a "master" of painting? During the Blue Period? Or did he become a master after he embraced Cubism? Or more appropriately, when there is a disagreement among Supreme Court Justices over the constitution, who among them has failed to master reading.

More specifically, ask someone from the Sunbelt if there is only one way to pronounce p,e,n. Or ask another person if there is a single way to read Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs -- then ask Bruno Bettleheim. I think their answers would be resounding NO's. I am certain that my answers would be NO! Knowledge is constructed in the mind of the learner -- it is not transferrable nor is it transferred. It is not a package. Moreover, it is not, and cannot be, external to the learner.

Ralph Waldo Emerson summarized this point quite well in his essay "Self-Reliance":"There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide ... The power which recides in him is new in nature, and no one but he knows what is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried."

Now, I hear people under their breath saying "Yes, but those are criticisms of how mastery learning is used -- not mastery learning itself." They continue with this muttering, "Your concerns are genuine, but they concern human error, not problems with the system." Then the voices taper off into expletives that I cannot repeat aloud. My retort is simple; of what benefit is mastery learning if not for human benefit? Mastery learning has no life of its own. Humans give it life. A discussion of mastery learning without deference to the contextual situation in which mastery learning finds life is tantamount to suggesting that brushes, oils, and canvas create a painting. To dismiss criticisms of mastery learning because they concern human effort is to anthropormorphize mastery learning and to miss a fundamental point about teaching reading. Neil Postman suggests, "there is, in fact, no method of teaching which cannot be distorted, made into busy work or worse, when it is technicalized ... there is no escaping the fact that the principal method of any classroom is the personality and knowledge of the teacher, which is to say, teaching is an art. There is as many methods of good teaching as there are ways by which teachers communicate a love of learning, a respect of facts, and a fascination for ideas."

The focus of my speech shall be the translation of mastery learning theory into the practice of reading programs in schools. I will present the ramifications of that translation for classroom teachers by offering brief descriptions of reading programs in two school districts. In the next

thirty minutes, I would like to show you that implementation of mastery learning places unwarranted restrictions on teachers' decisions and behaviors during their reading instruction. My thesis shall be that if school districts design reading programs according to the principles of mastery learning, the teacher's role in reading instruction will be reduced to applying materials.

Why do schools adopt mastery learning as a model for reading instruction? There are, I think, two main reasons: 1) the philosophy of mastery learning, and 2) the need to legitimize reading programs in the public eye. First, the philosophy of mastery learning. Advocates of mastery learning assert that almost every student can learn to read with equal proficiency if reading instruction is segmented into separate skills which are arranged hierarchically according to difficulty, and learners are given unlimited time to learn one segment before considering the next.

Indeed, the notion that almost everyone can learn to read with equal competence is an attractive goal. However, several assumptions accompany this philosophy which some find less palitable.

1. Sub-skill theory for reading is correct.
2. The scope and sequence of the necessary sub-skills are well understood by curricular designers.
3. Everyone needs to know the same skills -- that is, everyone reads the same way.
4. The contextual setting does not affect reading ability or instructional need.
5. We have the ability to determine the presence or absence of a student's knowledge of reading.
6. And the most important assumption, learning time is limitless in schools.

Acceptance of mastery learning as the model for a reading program means you accept these six assumptions.

The need to legitimize reading programs in the public eye is the second major reason for adopting mastery learning. According to John Meyer and Brian Rowan, two organization theorists, schools maintain their position in society by garnering public confidence through the establishment and control of what Meyer and Rowan call 'ritual classifications' -- teachers certification, student status, and curricular topics. That is, as long as the public accepts that schools set high standards for the quality of their teachers, the knowledge of their students, and the information to be presented to students, schools have a legitimate place in society, and the public does not question their products. Recently, however, the public has criticized schools on all these 'ritual classifications' -- by far the loudest outcry has been concerned with student status. More precisely, the public charges that schools do not produce literate students or literate graduates. These citizen "demand more quid pro quo," "more bang for their bucks," or "more pros for their quids" if you will. They seek an increased efficiency in reading instruction. Since they also question the quality of teachers, many suggest that the solution to illiteracy should be sought in a scientific "teacher-proof" method, that follows the model of industry with its unquestionable, or at least unquestioned, production capacity. To regain public confidence in the reading program, and therefore in the schools, schools seek a mechancism to tighten the coupling between reading instruction and reading outcome, and to provide substantial evidence of students' reading competence. According to its literature, mastery learning is such a mechancism.

The marriage between mastery learning and the need to legitimize was made in a theoretical heaven. By implementing mastery learning, schools will be able to demonstrate that almost all students will become masters of reading, thereby restoring the school's position in society. Furthermore,

mastery learning fulfills the expectations of the American public; poor instruction is offered as the culprit of past indecretions and promises are made to tighten the rein on reading instruction in the future. According to mastery learning advocates, reading instruction has just been mismanaged in the past. Moreover, the schools do not have to rely on the rhetoric of control; they can produce test scores to certify that students are new and improved readers. And after all, who can argue with increased test scores?

However, as with many marriages, what shines during the planning stages, tarnishes in reality. Arguments are made whether or not schools can, or even should, meet the assumptions of mastery learning. For example, Kenneth Goodman, president of the International Reading Association, argues that sub-skill instruction precludes students and teachers from understanding fully the purpose and the process of reading. On the other hand, S. Jay Samuels, an editor of the Reading Research Quarterly, maintains that sub-skill instruction is based on tangible evidence, and is therefore appropriate. And so it is with most of the other assumptions -- counterarguments abound -- except for one assumption. Few argue that there is unlimited time to learn to read in schools.

It is simply the nature of present day schools to limit learning time. The rigidity of class periods is exacerbated in mastery learning programs by interclass homogeneous grouping. Class periods must end on time or the entire school's daily schedule is thrown-off. Marking periods still exist in school of which I am aware. Whether students receive traditional letter grades or a checklist of materials covered, the learning time is segmented into units and teachers, students and parents expect progress to be made during those time units. Then, each June decisions are made whether or not a student will pass to the next grade, level, pod, or what have you. Are

not these annual decisions based in part on a student's progress in reading? Finally, there are theshold points when decisions about graduation from elementary grades are made; when decisions are made whether a student will receive a diploma, a certificate of attendance, or nothing at all. These cut-off points also limit the time to learn to read and they become more rigid as the public demands more accountability from a school's reading program. Clearly, in schools today, even in those with the most celebrated mastery programs the time for learning to read is not limitless. Schools can not retain legitimacy and allow unlimited time for learning. Schools cannot, or at least are not willing to, meet the most important assumption of mastery learning: UNLIMITED TIME.

Regardless of a school's perspective on the other assumptions, the implementation of mastery learning in schools, with their limited time for learning, reduces the role of teachers to applying materials. Let me explain how this happens. For the sake of argument, let us assume that schools can and should accept all the other assumptions of mastery learning. What effect will limited time for learning to read have on a mastery reading program organized because of the philosophy of mastery learning and the need to legitimize the reading program to the public? First, and foremost, limited time in the form of theshold points and the public's expection of reading competence for all force the goals for reading instruction to be set at the lowest acceptable level. In a limited time, even the slowest students must achieve mastery of reading or the school fails to legitimize itself. Under this pressure, love of literature, original interpretation of literature, and other such endeavors fall by the wayside as literacy goals. Basic or functional literacy, however ill-defined, carries the day. Thus, mastery learning with conditions of limited time means that the definition of reading

is reduced to a set of easily definable, and readily identifiable skills. Second, limited time in a mastery reading program augments the already exaggerated authority of testing in the mastery model. With literacy goals reduced to testable skills, a student's reading competence is defined as his success on tests. Literacy becomes the student's ability to demonstrate their mastery of test items. Test items, I might add, of questionable validity reliability. Finally, limited time, mastery learning, and the legitimization need place considerable pressure on schools to pace reading instruction so that students will demonstrate appropriate reading competence at the aforementioned theshold and testing points. This means the pace of instruction must be controlled to an extent.

In combination, limited time and the legitimization need render mastery learning the same as any other rational managerial strategy such as systems management, management by objectives, or even, Taylor's factory system. The problem which faces schools is how to allocate resources to produce the maximum number of literate students, as defined by tests, in the designated time periods. Learning to read becomes a managerial, not an educational, concern.

Since all students are to learn the same skills in a mastery reading program, schools seek a standard and predictable way to reach the goals of minimum reading competence. As in other managerial strategies, workers, in our case teachers, are considered the same as other qualitatively different resources. In a mastery reading program with its need for standard and predictable methods, the value of pre-packaged materials transcends that of teachers. Materials are easily controllable and teachers, you see, are much less so. The predominant source of these pre-packaged materials is commercial publishers, but curricular committees in a few

districts have developed detailed materials for use in their district. The model for mastery learning with its series of criterion-referenced tests insures that the materials will be used in a standard way. Since the tests are developed prior to the commencement of instruction, and they are designed to follow the materials, periodic review of the test scores by administrators will determine if teachers are applying the materials according to prescribed procedures.

Whether using the basal or implementing a district program, the result is the same. Within mastery reading programs in today's schools, the teaching of reading is reduced to the application of prepackaged materials and the delivery of tests according to someone else's plan. In fact, nothing of significance is left under teachers' control. The curriculum is decided outside the classroom, with minimal input from teachers. The procedures to reach the curricular goals are prescribed by the authors of the programs, and measures are taken to insure standard use. The devices to determine when the goals have been reached are designed by experts. Even the pace of the application of the materials is largely beyond teachers' control. The limited time and legitimization need bring pressure to progress at a standard pace at least.

Under mastery reading programs, teachers become simply technicians in a production procedure. Tests make decisions on student progress -- teachers need only check the scores. Quality control is also predetermined -- should a student fail to reach mastery, a pre-planned reteaching packet is used to teach the same skill in a different way. Ultimately, in mastery reading programs, teachers control only the precision with which they apply the materials supplied for them. With all else decided, the stringent application of the pre-packaged materials becomes the end of classroom reading

instruction rather than the means for the development of literate students. Participants in mastery reading programs lose sight of the purpose for reading instruction and perseverate on the procedure of reading instruction.

Let me briefly summarize my argument to this poin Schools adopt mastery learning as a model for reading programs because of its philosophy and their need to regain public confidence. Yet, the implementation of mastery learning according to theory is thwarted by limited time for learning. The combination of limited time and the legitimization need render mastery learning for reading instruction a rational managerial strategy. So conceived, mastery reading programs reduce the role of teachers to deliverers of a pre-packaged program.

Some examples from two school districts may illustrate my points. The Chicago experiment with mastery learning and reading instruction may be this nation's most celebrated reading program. Therefore, I will present direct quotations from Chicago administrators' published descriptions of their reading program. The second school district served as a model for the Right to Read Program; it is a large suburban district, with approximately 25 elementary schools. Quotations from published descriptions of this district's program will be supplemented with anecdotal reports to insure that everyone doesn't fall asleep. The stories are quotations from interviews with district personnel conducted in the fall of 1980 during an investigation of a different question. The extensive quotation is necessary to allow the school districts to speak for themselves.

My argument rests on several assertions, but it centers on two issues: the reasons schools adopt mastery learning for their reading programs, and limited time for learning. I stated that school district's adopt mastery learning because of its philosophy and their need for legitimization. Smith

and Katims, two designers of the Chicago program, made the following statements concerning why mastery learning was appropriate for Chicago.

> "The system is based on a theory that has been successful in other areas, a system that has as its explicit goal the achievement of reading success for all students."

So much for the philosophy. How about legitimization? Smith and Katims wrote,

> "Each summer Chicago girds itself for its two regularly scheduled disasters: The Chicago Cubs and the newspaper publication of reading test scores. Though the overwhelmingly complex and arduous task of improving the Cubs is readily comprehended by the Chicago citizenry, they do get testy from time to time about those reading scores ..."

The second district lists the following statement as the fourth objective of its reading program. The quotation implies that the objectives have been limited to the basic skills to accommodate the slower students who must also master them.

> "The assumption is made that children can master the basic skills given appropriate instruction and time."

Two statements from the printed description of the second program suggest that it also has a legitimization need.

> "The reading program is defined and information is made available to the communities served by the schools, to the Board of Education, and to others who have an interest."

> "A criterion-referenced testing system is used to provide objective evidence of pupil's mastery of basic reading skills."

Moving to the second major assertion, limited time, we find that the Chicago program is equally notorious in their penchant to limit the time for learning. Hannon and Katims stated,

> "In Chicago, promotion to high school has been linked to progress through the matrix of reading objectives. The promotion policy specifies that pupils who have not mastered 80% of the objectives in each of the 13 reading levels shall be retained in elementary school for an additional year."

They continued,

> "(The policy put) an end to 'social promotion' and mandated that at the end of grades 3, 6, and 8, students not reading at the expected levels will not be promoted."

In these quotations the effect of the legitimization need is demonstrated in the Chicago program -- there are expectations for learning to read, specifically in three-year intervals.

In the second program, limited time was described as pressure to maintain a pace for reading instruction. One teacher put the concern in this way,

> "We are required to record the criterion test scores and the dates that the tests were taken on student file cards. These cards are reviewed every other week by our reading teacher. Sometimes the principal looks at them and announces whose class is doing well over the loud speaker."

I think you will agree that the foundation for my argument is solid for these two exemplary programs. Mastery learning was adopted for its philosophy and its ability to meet the legitimization need. Also, in these districts, there is a limited time for learning to read. But, has the implementation of mastery learning reduced the teacher's role during reading instruction?

In order to substantiate my entire argument, the desire to control reading instruction must be established, then, the ascention of tests and materials must be demonstrated, and finally, the reduction of the teacher's role should be presented.

For Chicago, Katims stated,

> "Under traditional teaching, students are usually place in reading groups. The groups primarily spend their time reading. There is no real instruction in reading."

He continued,

> "Still the critical problem in planning for and making decisions in the process of reading instruction is not that the teacher is too contrained. Rather, the problem is one of an embarassing over-abundance of instructional materials ..."

Finally,

> "Left on his or her own as curricular and instructional developer, the teacher's task is arduous. The project team wanted to relieve individual teachers of this task ..."

The second district was not as accommodating with explicit statements concerning the need to control reading instruction. However, during an interview, the reading coordinator stated,

> "This is a large district with a mobile population. We found a basal series with a strong curriculum that we want all our teachers to follow. That way, we can easily accommodate the student who moves from one school to another. The teachers in those schools are doing the same thing."

The importance of tests and their relationship with the materials is the next point to be established. Chicago, again Katims,

> "Under the program, on the other hand, the teacher instructs the entire class, the pupil then works on related activities, and then a formative test determines what the pupil does next."

If a student fails the test, then Smith and Katims suggest the materials will provide the necessary instruction.

> "(Remedial exercises) are designed to provide additional instruction, additional practice, and something similar to additional testing. They are designed to be done by pupils alone, with the teacher roving the classroom to assess progress.

I have alluded to the importance placed on testing in the second program when I offered the quotations concerning limited time and the legitimization need. Yet, there is more.

> "The Tests of Basic Reading Skills are designed to enable a teacher to know whether each one of his or her pupils has learned what it is that has been taught at each level of instruction through the use of the materials which compose the reading program."

A fourth grade teacher in the second district described the relationship between criterion-referenced tests and materials in this way,

> "I took several tests home and asked my husband to take them. He's a vice president of his company and has a degree in engineering. I can vouch for his ability to read. Anyway, there were at least three test on which he failed to reach mastery because he couldn't pass the sub-tests. The funny part is that our fourth grade son, who goes to school in this district .... Well, the funny part is that my son could past all the tests. It's a day my son will never forget."

The desire to control instruction is real, and tests and materials seem to do most of the work. What, then, is the role of teachers in these districts?

Smith and Katims provide a straight-forward answer for Chicago.

> "No prior grouping is required on the part of the teacher, instruction is laid out in detail, identification of pupils who need remediation and what skills they need help on is done by objective testing, and the amount of remediation and materials for the remediation are provided. Since the class is taught as a whole, preparation for reading instruction by the teacher is a single preparation rather than multiple preparations."

Clearly in Chicago, the teacher is to apply the prepackaged program. What about the second district? I quote,

> "Teachers cannot change the pupils, or the materials or the scope and sequence of skill ... teachers can change the pace at which they present the materials. The rate at which teachers move through the program is the one variable over which they have complete control."

This statement describes instruction as the application of materials and restricts teachers to that role. In addition, several other quotations already presented suggest that administrators influence, if not control, the pacing of instruction in this district. The teacher's role during reading instruction was clear to the second district's staff and faculty. 445 classroom teachers, 23 reading teachers, and 20 administrators responded to the following statement. "If teachers decided to teach reading without the basal workbooks and worksheets, it would be acceptable to the administration." 93% of the teachers, 74% of the reading teachers, and 94% of the administrators disagreed strongly with that statement. The reading coordinator found it "totally unacceptable."

Thus, the argument concerning the reduced teacher's role is supported by the statements of participants in two exemplary mastery reading programs. But, what is the significance of this finding? In other words, so what! In mastery reading programs, the procedure of reading instruction overshadows the purpose for reading instruction. Neil Postman calls this phenonemon, "the technicalization of instruction." Technicalization occurs when the technique of reading instruction becomes standard and rigid, and the

participants no longer acknowledge other methods for developing literate students. Advocates of technicalization seek simplicity where ambiguity and complexity once stood, and objectivity where human judgement use to rule.

The technicalization of reading instruction under mastery learning provides teachers with an algorithm to decide objectively how to produce literate students. Under this system, subjectivity -- teacher's judgement -- is devalued and of little use. In a mastery reading program, what is important is what the objective test determines. Moreover, this technicalization renders teachers' knowledge of the reading process and reading instruction useless because the method of reading instruction has already been created by others, either basal authors or curricular committees. Teachers need only learn how to apply the particular pre-packaged program. Katims suggests this need only take one or two hours of training because teachers are provided with a way to calculate the production of literate students and a method to determine precisely whether or not a student is literate. Literacy, of course, must be defined as success on an objective test. Before mastery learning, teachers had to judge for themselves the degree of literacy of a student. Now, objectivity replaces subjectivity.

When objectivity supplants subjectivity in the development of any system, the participants in that system eventually become unable to think and to function outside that system. They become what Karl Mannhiem called substantially irrational. For our concern, teachers become unable to act intelligently according to their own insight. They look for solutions to all problems within the pre-packaged program. But what about the many students who fall outside the scope of the prepackaged curriculum? Under mastery learning, where objectivity has replaced

subjectivity, the teachers is unable to cope with the instructional needs of these students. An example may make my point clearer.

It seems that lexicography skills were included in the third grade curriculum for reading instruction in the second district of which I spoke earlier. Even cursory familiarity with reading literature provides anyone with enough information to reject accent marks, diacritical marks, and syllabication division as thoughtful goals for reading instruction. According to the reading coordinator, only four of the nearly seventy-five third grade teachers questioned the inclusion of these objectives. Apparently, the remainder of the teachers were content to teach according to the curriculum. These four teachers did not reject the objectives as invalid, rather they sought to postpone the objectives because their students -- the good and the bad, the fast and the slow -- had great difficulty mastering them.

The request to delay the objectives was denied on the basis of two fundamental points of the mastery reading program: 1) the curriculum is not at fault when students do not pass a test -- it is poor instruction that is the culprit; and 2) the curriculum is above teachers' reapproach -- experts wrote the curriculum, and the curricular committee accepted it. These four teachers accepted the decision and continued to teach the content of these objectives according to the basal program.

When an author of the basal program visited the district, the subject of the questionable objectives was raised again. The author reported that the objectives were dropped from the third grade curriculum of the coming edition of the basal because they are irrelevant to reading. With this information, the teachers renewed their request to delay the objectives. This time the request was accepted, however, the teachers were

to continue to teach the objectives until the new edition was adopted. Until that time, they were to follow the program. Teachers, even armed with this information, could not or did not seek to delete these objectives. I assume the students of this district have, and will have to, suffer through questionable instruction because the participants in the mastery reading program were, and probably remain, substantially irrational -- not malicious mind you, but unable to act intelligently according to their own insight.

What is to be done? First, schools should not seek to neutralize their teachers with technicalization such as mastery learning. Rather, schools should seek to develop teacher's intellects in general, and their knowledge and judgement concerning reading and reading instruction in particular. Develop their subjectivity, if you will. This may take more than one or two hours of training, but it is time well spent. Then, teachers' judgement will determine what happen during their reading instruction. Teachers will control the program rather than be controlled by it. With the development of teacher's knowledge of reading and reading instruction, teachers will be able to adapt reading instruction to the individual needs of students in their classrooms instead of being required to adapt students to a standard curriculum designed outside the instructional context. I will call this an intellectual answer to technicalization of reading instruction through mastery learning.

If a standard reading curriculum is needed across a school district, let that curriculum be developed democratically. This process might start in school buildings with grade-level meetings in which teachers establish the necessary objectives for their grade level. In an across grade level meeting, teachers in each school could sort through a scope and sequence of goals for reading instruction. After particular schools

have established reading curricula, representative teachers from each school could meet to establish common ground for a district reading program. In this manner, a standard reading curriculum could be established which would be based on shared, and hopefully sound, assumptions and practices. This is a political answer to technicalization through mastery learning.

In realizing the intellectual and political answers, teachers will prove false the assumption that successful reading programs demand tight control of teachers' behavior. By their actions, teachers will demonstrate that they are the reading program.

And of course, there is an emotional answer to technicalization which ee cummings expressed so aptly.

> "While you and I have lips and voices which are for kissing and to sing with
>
> who cares if some one-eyed son of a bitch invents an instrument to measure Spring with?

References

Hannon, J. and Katims, M. The Chicago Plan: Mastery Learning in the Chicago Chicago Public Schools. Educational Leadership, 1979, 37, 120-122.

Katims, M. Unsystematic Observation on Sucess. Educational Leadership, 1979, 37, 118-124.

Postman, N. Teaching as a Conserving Activity. New York: Delta Books, 1979.

Ryan, D. and Schimidt, M. Mastery Learning: Theory, Research, and Implementation. Toronto: Ministry of Education, 1979.

Smith, J. and Katims, M. Reading in the City: The Chicago Mastery Learning Reading Program. Phi Delta Kappen, 1977, 57, 199-202.